

# Partnership seeking operating funds

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Like everyone else, the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership is asking the public for money.

While the organization is appealing for funds to repair storm damage at its Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails, it also needs operating funds.

The partnership's parent organization, the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, asked its members to make donations that will finance the partnership's operations.

"At a cost of approximately \$12,000 a year, the volunteers have brought in over \$1.7 million in federal, state and foundation grants - an impressive return on investment," the letter says.

"GHACP has now secured \$900,000 in project money that is still under contract," the letter continues. "If we don't secure the \$12,000 yearly needed to administer these funds (in 2012), we may lose all this funding."

The money raised by the volunteers was for the rail-trail, which was heavily damaged in late summer by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee.

Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director and chief steward of the trail's development, along with a committee of volunteers, said it is damaged every time there is heavy rain.

The ultimate solution, Skulsky said, is to install larger drainage pipes under the trail, in various places. So, in addition to asking for the operating funds, the partnership is seeking the donation of money and/or materials to repair the trail.

The partnership also listed other activities and accomplishments over the past 10 years. Among them, the partnership:

- Helped other agencies to conserve land and protect green space.
- Funded meteorological stations with cameras at Hazleton Area High School, Valley Elementary/Middle School, Weatherly and Penn State Hazleton.
- Created the Volunteer Center of Greater Hazleton.
- Helped the Mountain Council of Governments to beautify gateways to Hazleton.
- Worked with the Greater Hazleton Health Alliance to get people active on the trails, with more than 118,000 visits since 2005.
- Developed the Black Creek Township Memorial Park.
- Developed a community assessment committee whose members tackle local important issues.
- Worked with Eagle Scout candidates, Scout organizations and local schools to better the area.

Paul Oswald, a local Boy Scout official, said one Scout will be erecting a flagpole with a solar light at the trail's parking lot for his Eagle Scout project, and there may be a second Eagle Scout project at the trail.

Schiavo honored

The partnership gave attorney Pasco Schiavo a certificate of appreciation for all of the pro bono legal

work he has done for the trail in the last decade.

"This organization would not be running without Pasco," said Donna Palermo, chairperson of the partnership. "Since 2001, he has negotiated land agreements with Cabot Corp., Blue Ridge Realty, the North Branch Land Trust and the Hazleton City Authority. He's a gentleman who has done a lot for this organization."

Skulsky had more praise.

"I don't think we'd have a trail without Pasco's help," he said. "He did a lot of legwork. Anytime I needed a question answered, he has been there."

Schiavo replied that he was glad to help.

"It's been a lot of work, but it was very satisfying. I'd like to see it progress more," he said.

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